

Northampton Cable Access and Ascertainment Board
Summary of Written Comments Received as of
July 1, 2005

Ilse Barron – Need a menu of program packages tailored to viewers needs/interests. Include a Boston affiliate station (WBZ-4-CBS)) and have multiple affiliate options similar to Cape Cod. Cable competition is needed in City. Include CAAB in the negotiations. Adelphia channel line up is attached to letter as example of programming options.

Noreen Beebe – Cable costs are high and movies are repeated too often with too many commercials. Need one movie channel with updated movies and no commercials as part of standard service.

Petition for Lowering Rates for the Elderly and Disabled for Cable Service – 102 signatures collected and submitted by Patricia Williams.

Frances Crowe – CATV should not air WFCR fundraising appeals – it is not fair to other non-profits. City needs to gain control of the studio and it should move from Bradford St.

Rosina Rogers – Need a system upgrade. Need a senior discount.

Karl Knapp – With technical advances allowing for home production, a production facility is not as important - please don't over prioritize this. More access channels are important so there is sufficient air time for producers. Bradford St. studio is inadequate. Demand has gone down because the facility is not open and Comcast does not return phone calls. All of his shows have suffered severely from audio and visual degradation while aired on Ch. 15 including fuzzy voices and orange fuzzy faces.

Clodagh Kosior – View negotiations in the context of broader media control and access. Access to a percent of bandwidth is paramount. Bandwidth would provide multiple channels, internet, wireless internet. Consult with Russ Newman and make CAAB report available to the public.

Stevie Converse – Add Russ Newman to the CAAB. Negotiate for 1) Bandwidth percentage to provide PEG channels, independent media channel, internet for low income residents. 2) Contract monitoring/oversight board. 3) I-Net drops at libraries, Florence Community Center, Florence Civic Center, Senior Center.

4) Studio separate from Comcast with management by a cable access corp.

5) Ability to record data onto separate media (VHS, DVD, DV tapes).

6) Comcast dissemination of program schedules etc. in subscriber bills.

7) Low income and senior discounts.

West. MA Campaign for Media Democracy/Joel Saxe – Negotiate for programmatic reforms for media democracy and to fund independent (Indy) media stations. Need a 24 hr. cable news network, economic/racial justice through media democracy. Demand more revenues come back to the community. Access TV is under funded and volunteer dependent. Studio staffing has

been cut, phone calls not returned, records not produced upon request and programming has suffered as a result. Negotiate for:

- 1) Comcast and commercial networks provide 10% of gross yearly profits for public access media.
- 2) Create a community media arts facility to include access TV and Valley Free Radio with line item funding for both organizations.
- 3) Reimburse City for staffing not provided under existing contract to be used for media arts grants to create local programming.
- 4) Comcast gets networks to support local/regional Indy media.

Leslie Fraidstern – Be strong in negotiations with Comcast. If needs not met, take the matter to court or create a subscriber switch to satellite dish. Needs must be met in order to give Comcast a ten year contract. Proposal should be brought for public review before signing. Monitoring of contract is critical – a committee should be appointed.

M. Atwood – Experience rising cable costs and more of the same old movies over and over. Consider other cable companies that are less expensive with better programs.

Friederike Denig – Comcast and other utilities should be required to install cables underground like in Europe. The landscape is being polluted with more and more poles and cables.

James Ault – Access TV could be used effectively for educational purposes in high schools and colleges where students collaborate with producers especially now that digital video makes it possible and inexpensive to edit on desktop computers. Recommends more collaborations of this type.

Mari Gottdiener – She attended one, two-hour session offered in 2003 (the only one training offered in two years). Six people attended the training. Jeff quickly reviewed the cameras and then sent people out to try them out. That was the end of the training. There was no manual or instruction provided. No assistance was provided in using the other equipment. After filming it took several months to get Jeff to return phone calls to schedule editing time in the studio. There was no formal training on use of the editing equipment and no manuals relevant to the equipment in the studio. Jeff only had a rudimentary understanding of using the editing computer himself. They had to find their own way and actually taught Jeff some things about digital editing. He was only available on a time limited basis and was not in the office during his regularly scheduled hours. Oftentimes he would leave the studio open for her to use when he was not there leaving the studio vulnerable to vandalism and theft. After 15 hours of editing over a two month period, Jeff informed her that he had deleted the file. He also lost another videotape. At the same time Jeff began working on a new series of his own which he planned, taped, and appeared in. His show was identical to our show in concept and nearly identical in name. Based on this experience, it appears Comcast is not committed to its stated responsibility to provide and train our residents in cable access. The new contract needs specific, thorough language regarding training, quality of equipment, and accessibility to the facility.

Stevie Converse – Community Cable Questionnaire submitted. Summary of responses is attached. Use the City website to share information with the public.

Bill Dornbusch, School District Technology Coordinator – Northampton Public Schools Needs for I-Net. The Schools need a robust, reliable wide area network over the I-Net. Currently the I-Net is not capable of carrying bandwidth necessary to conduct school business and the reliability is insufficient due in part to the age of the backbone equipment running the network. This involves all school buildings not just the High School and Middle School. The I-Net should be capable of running an Ethernet network at 1GB per second. The current I-Net runs at approximately 2MB per second. Below is a summary of school functions and applications that should be (but are not currently) supported by the I-Net due to speed/bandwidth capability and lack of reliability. Detailed requirements attached.

- Distance learning and video conferencing
- Centralized administrative systems
- Instructional resources such as basic internet research, streaming video, and Internet 2 access.
- Technology administration-consolidating servers in a central location, backups over the network, workstation administration over the network
- Voice communication – significant savings could be achieved using IP telephony through the I-Net if the carrying capacity was available.

Stevie Converse – Written Questions/Comments stated at 6/14/05 hearing – Where are the rules for use of access channels? Where is the public record of names and addresses of all people using the channels as required by Article 5 in the current contract? These should be made accessible online. What is the status of the \$150,000 studio equipment/facility improvements in existing contract? Why not annual payments towards upgrades based on life expectancy of equipment? Is lump sum or 5% of gross revenues better for the City – include all revenues. Periodic trainings in the existing contract is too vague – need at least twice per year with advertising. There should be no commercial access available on public access channels. Debates between candidates should be aired on access tv but not infomercials. Why is Comcast allowed to produce public access programming under S. 5 of the contract? PEG Access-need a percent of bandwidth. Funding should include all costs to create local programming. Studio should be in an accessible location with good signage – not in a school due to security and access concerns. Access TV should have a website. The station must be staffed full-time. The I-Net needs upgrading to use fiber optic technology to accommodate technology advances. All city buildings and community organizations should be on the I-Net. Link I-Net to other towns in the region. Viewers should be able to record programs on VCR and DVD for their own use. Customers should not be forced to upgrade their service by cable package changes decided by Comcast. Contract needs oversight. Every household should have affordable, reliable internet. Comcast should not interfere with a City wireless internet system for residents. Contract term should be shorter. Collaborate with other community access stations.

Tapestry Health – Tapestry has limited funds for outreach and publicity for its community service programs. They would like to collaborate with access tv for public service announcements, call-in shows to advocate for community health. Would be interested in training if available.

Joel Russell – written statement read into record at 6/14/05 hearing. Comcast track record is of lost opportunities. Poor levels of staffing and inadequate outreach. Appreciates Democracy Now and encourages more alternative programming. Local programming cannot improve without adequate facilities, staff, and equipment – this is not happening here. The studio is difficult to find and is not accessible. Northampton has talented, educated and motivated citizens who would take advantage of facilities if they were readily available. Adequate training is critical for adults and children. The City must hold Comcast to a much higher standard of community service in the contract renewal. They must provide improved budget, staffing, training, equipment, production facilities, and outreach for local programming.

Vanessa Oquendo, City MIS Director – Written statement submitted at 6/14/05 hearing. The current hybrid cable/fiber I-Net has proven unreliable and incapable of carrying the volume of business, both administrative and educational, and prevents the City from expanding applications. City needs not possible due to network issues include: IP telephony, permit tracking for Fire Department, reliable internet and email, centralized energy management system, GIS for public safety departments, remote backups at various city locations, internet training via webcasts, webcasting of public meetings, easy administration and troubleshooting of WAN equipment. The current I-Net runs at 1.5MB. The standard modern network is 1GB or 10GB. An all fiber I-Net would allow us a modern network with state of the art equipment.

Bob Cahillane – Switched from Comcast to Verizon for internet access due to over charging. Customer service upon return of equipment was rude and threatening. Comcast staff person shook the equipment vigorously and now he is being threatened with damage costs. One month cable TV service with HBO at \$80 is too high.

Ella Smolenski – Comcast has played a critical role in televising City Council meetings. Comcast has provided a great service to the City, and this service should be maintained.

Richard Winnick, Cable Board member under previous contracts – The previous studio at the high school experienced problems with sharing a facility. He recommends against moving the studio to the high school. Also, students who had been trained were not available to volunteer as was expected. There is no longer a city technical advisor on the day to day operation of the I-Loop and cable television connections which has resulted in deterioration in all of the city's schools. Under last contract, funds were not provided to maintain the equipment over time. The new contract should include provision for acquisition of new equipment, repair, replacement and not just one-time payments. Comcast should provide an ombudsperson to address City on-going needs. A specified level of service should be required and maintained over time.

Blanche Derby – Consider another cable provider. Comcast does not give back to the community. She tried to sign up to edit and air her video on edible plants in Northampton but the studio was often closed and messages not returned. She went to Easthampton instead. Current local programs of City Council meetings, polka, and event listings are boring! We have a creative population in Northampton that would produce wonderful videography if only given the chance.